Council Highlights: December 2001

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COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS is intended to provide quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). It is produced regularly throughout the academic year.

This issue covers the months of November and December 2001.

Update on secondary school issues

Over the past months, members of the university community have continued to meet with representatives of both the Ministry of Education (MED) and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to discuss issues arising from the introduction of the new secondary school curriculum. The joint MTCU/COU Working Group on University Capacity has reviewed and recommended measures to ensure that, as the government of Ontario has pledged, every qualified and motivated secondary school graduate will have a place in a postsecondary institution during the period of increased demand associated with the double cohort.

A separate MTCU/MED/COU Double Cohort Committee continues to meet to consider how changes in the content of courses and in assessment practices could possibly affect university admission requirements.

COU hosts a reception for members of the government caucus

The Council of Ontario Universities hosted a reception for members of the government caucus on December 3. A highlight was a display and computer presentation that recognized the many SuperBuild university projects currently in the design, development or construction phases throughout the province. Council Chair Mordechai Rozanski and COU President Ian Clark welcomed the more than 70 government and university representatives, including Dianne Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, and David Lindsay, President and CEO of the Ontario SuperBuild Corporation, who were on hand to celebrate the collaborative achievements of the two communities.

Deputy Minister meets with OPAS Board of Directors

Kevin Costante, Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, met with the OPAS Board of Directors at their October 31 meeting. The Deputy Minister outlined Ministry priorities, including university capacity, employment-related skills and the growing importance of e-learning. He also noted the importance of OPAS's work with learning technologies and in providing access to university expertise for continued learning for those in the workforce.

First "Annual Dialogue" between health sciences affiliates and government

COU's health sciences affiliates and the Ontario government held its first "Annual Dialogue" on December 14. Officials from the ministries of Health and Long-Term Care, Finance, Energy, Science and Technology, and Training, Colleges and Universities outlined their ministry's

mandate and priorities, and representatives of the faculties of nursing, medicine, rehabilitation sciences and pharmacy discussed ways in which university health sciences programs can help government to achieve its objectives.

OPAS awarded funds to provide online support for faculty

The Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills (OPAS) was awarded $300,000 by the federal government's Office for Learning Technologies for a project that will provide online support for faculty who use technology to enhance their teaching. The service will include templates,

evaluations and moderated computer conferences, as well as other forms of support based on recommendations arising from OPAS's Summer Institutes on Learning Technologies and from last year's pilot project carried out with 175 faculty participants. OPAS and its partners, including the universities, IBM, WebCT and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, had previously secured $300,000 in matching funds and in-kind services to ensure the start-up of this significant initiative.

Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine holds educational conference

On November 22 and 23, the Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine held its third annual educational conference at the University of Western Ontario. Sponsored by Associated Medical Services Inc., the conference focused on the social determinants of health – poverty, lifestyle, ecosystem health, politics and diversity – and how they are integrated into medical curricula and clinical practice.

RIM's Mike Lazaridis is featured speaker at Visionary Seminar

On November 7, OPAS presented its fifth annual Visionary Seminar at the University of Waterloo. This year's event featured Dr. Mike Lazaridis, President and co-CEO of Research in Motion (RIM) and the inventor of the BlackBerry, the first wireless two-way pager. Dr. Lazaridis delivered a presentation entitled "Wireless Breakthroughs" and afterward was presented with the 2001 OPAS Visionary Award. Over 2,500 students, faculty and business leaders participated in the seminar at the host site and by live satellite at 23 other university and college campus locations in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia as well as by webcast. Bell Canada sponsored this year's event.

Applications for law schools up by 10% this year

The Ontario Law School Application Service, a division of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC), has reported a 10% increase in applications for first-year law admissions for studies beginning in September 2002. This is by far the largest year-over-year increase in application volume since the centralization of the law school application service in 1997. Once the upper-year applications have all been processed, this increase could be higher still.

A few factors likely contributed to this increase. OUAC increased its advertising of the law school application service this year, which resulted in an increase in requests for application forms. In addition, individual institutions have greatly enhanced their recruiting efforts. So far this year (as of December 7), 3,253 individuals have submitted 11,719 program choices at Ontario's six law schools.

Update on undergraduate program review audits

The process of undergraduate program reviews continues with three institutional audits in 2001-2002. These quality-assurance audits, which are now entering the sixth year of a seven-year cycle, are conducted by senior academics who have had extensive administrative experience. The auditors are appointed by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) on the recommendation of the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC), which oversees the audit process. The auditors not only undertake an examination of documents but also conduct a site-visit to gain a full understanding of an institution's review policy and practice. They visited the University of Toronto this November and will be going to Laurentian University in February 2002 and the University of Waterloo in March 2002. Reports on the three audits conducted last year are at various stages of completion: the Lakehead report has been formally received by OCAV, a draft report on Ryerson is in the hands of the institution for review, and the Trent draft is in the final stages of preparation.

An important condition of the UPRAC audit requires institutions to report within one year of their audit on how they have dealt with the auditors' recommendations. Three more universities – Queen's, Carleton and York – have submitted their responses on schedule and all have fully

adopted the recommendations, thereby strengthening already sound processes.

In May, OCAV unanimously agreed to extend Dr. Greg Moran's term as Chair of OCAV and UPRAC. OCAV also said goodbye to one of its members on UPRAC, Dr. Harvey Weingarten, who left McMaster University to become president of the University of Calgary. Dr. Sheila Embleton from York University was appointed Dr. Weingarten's replacement.

Chairs of affiliate groups gather for first annual meeting

On October 19, the chairs of 18 COU affiliate groups met with Council Chair Mordechai Rozanski, COU President Ian Clark and other representatives of the COU Secretariat for a briefing and discussion of key issues such as enrolment growth, funding, accountability and secondary school reform. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for members to discuss how emerging issues in their respective areas could be collectively addressed.

Equity survey of university applicants now complete

In August 2001, the COU Standing Committee on Employment and Educational Equity and the COU Standing Committee on the Status of Women mailed a survey to 96,240 Ontario university applicants. The survey was designed to provide a better understanding of the socio-economic status and representation of members of recognized designated groups (Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, members of visible minority groups, people with disabilities and women) in the university applicant pool. Results of the survey, which was administered by the Ontario Universities' Application Centre, are expected early in the new year.

Board chairs of Ontario universities meet

Chairs of boards of Ontario universities were joined by Executive Heads at their meeting on December 13. Wendy Cecil, Chair of the Council of Chairs of Ontario Universities (CCOU) and Chair of the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, and Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, Chair of Council and President of the University of Guelph, welcomed the group. The meeting included a discussion of current issues, an update of advocacy initiatives and a presentation by EKOS Research Group on its study on public perceptions of quality in Ontario universities.

Appointment of new ADM to Training, Colleges and Universities

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities announced the appointment of Jessica Hill to the position of Assistant Deputy Minister of the Postsecondary Division, effective January 7, 2002. Ms. Hill brings her experience leading large, complex policy and operational initiatives to the position. Over the last 4½ years, she has held ADM positions at the Ministry of Community and Social Services: initially, as ADM of Integrated Services for Children and, more recently, as ADM of Program Management. Before that, Ms. Hill spent 12 years with the Ministry of Health where she held several positions, including ADM of Mental Health Programs and Services.

Executive Director of CMEC attends Council meeting

Dr. Paul Cappon, Executive Director of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC), attended the December 14 meeting of Council. Dr. Cappon provided an update on CMEC, the organization that enables ministers of education to consult with each other on matters of mutual interest, and with national education organizations and the federal government.

Number of online applications continues to increase

OUAC's user-friendly web-based application option – which is available for most of its application divisions – continues to grow in popularity and usage. Over 95% of the province's medical school applicants and over 80% of applicants to teacher education programs seeking 2002 admissions have applied online. So far, over 1,350 web applications for 2002 admission have been received from international applicants outside Canada. Almost 4,750 domestic, non-secondary applicants

have also used this system so far this cycle.

OUAC is piloting the Ontario Secondary School web application system with the co-operation of eight school boards this year and expects to process over 5,000 individual applications online in this pilot project. Next year, with the web application available in all Ontario secondary schools, it is hoped that at least 40,000 of the expected 90,000+ applicants will take advantage of this efficient process. With the success of the new systems, the Centre looks forward to automating the law application system to the web for the 2003 admissions cycle.